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ABSTRACT

This report examines the use of foreign language skills within the Army, Department of State, Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service, and Federal Bureau of Investigation, discussing the nature and impact of foreign language shortages, strategies for addressing these shortages, and efforts to address current and projected shortages. All four agencies reported shortages of translators, interpreters, diplomats, and intelligence specialists with foreign language skills critical to successful job performance. These shortfalls adversely affected agency operations and hindered military, law enforcement, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts. Many shortages were in hard-to-learn Middle Eastern and Asian languages. Shortages varied by agency, occupation, and language. Agencies used many workforce strategies to fill their foreign language needs (providing staff with language training, paying incentives, recruiting employees with foreign language skills, and using information technology). One agency adopted a strategic approach to workforce planning that links the foreign language program to the agency's strategic objectives and program goals. The other agencies have yet to pursue overall strategic planning. Seven appendixes present: research details; human capital management and workforce planning guidance; comments from the Army, Department of State, Foreign Commercial Service, and Federal Bureau of Investigation; and General Accounting Office contact and staff acknowledgements. (SM)

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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

January 2002

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
FCS	Foreign Commercial Service
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
LEILA	Law Enforcement Interagency Linguist Access
NSA	National Security Agency
NSEP	National Security Education Program
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPM	Office of Personnel Management

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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

January 31, 2002

The Honorable Thad Cochran
The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd
United States Senate

The Honorable James A. Leach
The Honorable Sam Farr
House of Representatives

In the wake of a changing security environment and the increasing globalization of the U.S. economy, federal agencies' needs for personnel with foreign language proficiency have grown significantly. Since the end of the Cold War, the emergence of new nation states, the presence of a wider range of security threats, and the signing of new trade agreements have imposed greater demands on the foreign language capabilities of federal agencies in areas such as intelligence gathering, counterterrorism efforts, diplomatic affairs, and U.S. commercial operations overseas. At the same time, many agencies have experienced reductions in their workforces, limited hiring, and a growing number of employees who are eligible for retirement. These conditions have contributed to gaps in foreign language skills that agencies are beginning to address. In light of the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the subsequent U.S. response, agency efforts to address such gaps have taken on increased importance and urgency.

As agreed with your offices, this report reviews the use of foreign language skills at the U.S. Army, the Department of State, the Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[1] Specifically, we (1) examined the nature and impact of reported foreign language shortages, (2) determined the strategies that federal agencies use to address these specific shortages, and (3) assessed

[1]We issued a separate For Official Use Only report which included details on National Security Agency/Central Security Service operations. See *Foreign Languages: Five Agencies Could Use Human Capital Strategy to Handle Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls* (GAO-02-237, Jan. 31, 2002). We also issued a classified report providing related staffing details on the National Security Agency/Central Security Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's foreign language programs. See *Foreign Languages: Staffing Shortfalls and Related Information for the National Security Agency and Federal Bureau of Investigation* (GAO-C-02-258R, Jan. 31, 2002).

the efforts of agencies to implement an overall strategic workforce plan to address current and projected shortages.

To answer these objectives, we initially reviewed the operations of 17 federal agencies and offices. We then selected 4 agencies for more detailed review, as agreed with your offices. We selected these agencies to ensure that we had a mix of both small and large programs and a broad representation of program areas including national security, foreign diplomacy, and U.S. economic interests. We then developed a data collection instrument that we administered to all 4 agencies. The State Department provided only partial information on foreign language shortages. We also conducted interviews with key officials in these agencies and reviewed and analyzed supporting documentation, data, and studies. For further information on our scope and methodology, see appendix I.

Results in Brief

The four federal agencies covered in our review reported shortages of translators and interpreters as well as shortages of staff, such as diplomats and intelligence specialists, with foreign language skills that are critical to successful job performance. Agency officials stated that these shortfalls have adversely affected agency operations and hindered U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts. Many shortages were in hard-to-learn languages from the Middle East and Asia, although shortages varied greatly depending on the agency, occupation, and language. Agency officials said that foreign language shortages are, in part, caused by technology advances that allow the collection of growing amounts of information and thus require greater numbers of staff proficient in foreign languages; by rising language proficiency requirements in the face of changing and more complex agency missions; and by a competitive job market that has made attracting and retaining staff more difficult. At the FBI, for example, shortages of language-proficient staff have resulted in the accumulation of thousands of hours of audiotapes and pages of written material that have not been reviewed or translated. The FBI says this situation has hindered its prosecution of criminal cases and limited its ability to identify, arrest, and convict violent gang members. Diplomatic and intelligence officials have stated that lack of staff with foreign language skills has weakened the fight against international terrorism and drug trafficking and resulted in less effective representation of U.S. interests overseas.

The agencies we reviewed reported using a range of workforce strategies in an attempt to fill their specific foreign language needs. These strategies included staff development efforts such as language training and pay incentives, human capital management efforts such as recruiting employees with foreign language skills or hiring contractors, or taking advantage of information technology such as networked computers and contractor databases to optimize the use of existing foreign language resources. In general, agencies used contractors to meet their additional translation and interpretation needs, while staff training was one of the most widely used options for filling language-skill needs in other areas. While these assorted efforts have had some success, the agencies' current strategies have not fully met the need for some foreign language skills.

One of the four agencies we reviewed has reported undertaking efforts to resolve its foreign language shortages by focusing on human capital management and workforce planning, as suggested in Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and GAO guidance.[2] The Federal Bureau of Investigation has instituted an action plan that links its foreign language program to the Bureau's strategic objectives and program goals. This action plan attempts to define the strategies, performance measures, responsible parties, and resources the Bureau needs to address current and projected foreign language shortages. In contrast, the other three agencies have yet to pursue overall strategic planning in this area. The Army, the State Department, and the Foreign Commercial Service's (FCS) initiatives are not part of a coordinated plan of action with regard to foreign language recruitment, training, pay incentives, and workforce restructuring.

In this report, we are recommending that the Army, the State Department, and the Foreign Commercial Service develop a comprehensive strategic approach to human capital management and workforce planning in order to better address current and projected shortages in staff with foreign language skills. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Army agreed with our recommendation but objected to a perceived requirement that Office of Personnel Management and GAO guidance must serve as the models for developing a strategic approach to human capital management. To address the Army's concern, we revised our recommendation to clarify that it focused on the core human capital and workforce planning

[2]See *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders* (GAO/OGC-00-14G, Sept. 2000) and *Strategic Human Resources Management: Aligning with the Mission* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Sept. 1999).

principles promoted by OPM and GAO. The State Department provided a list of activities that it believes are responsive to our recommendation. The Foreign Commercial Service agreed with the recommendation.

Background

Although more than 70 federal agencies have foreign language needs, some of the largest programs are concentrated in the Army, the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Office of Personnel and Management records indicate that the government employs just under a thousand translators and interpreters in the job series reserved for this group. The government also employs tens of thousands of individuals who use foreign language skills in positions such as cryptologic linguists,[3] human intelligence collectors,[4] FBI special agents and legal attachés, State Department Foreign Service officers, and Department of Commerce Foreign Commercial Service officers.[5] For the four agencies we reviewed, a total of nearly twenty thousand staff are employed in positions that require some foreign language proficiency.

Federal agencies use the foreign language proficiency scale established by the federal Interagency Language Roundtable to rank an individual's language skills. The scale has six levels from 0 to 5—with 5 being the most proficient—to assess an individual's ability to speak, read, listen, and write in another language. Proficiency requirements vary by agency and position but tend to congregate at the second and third levels of the scale. Table 1 shows the language skill requirements for each proficiency level.

[3]Cryptologic linguists specialize in intercepting and interpreting intelligence information collected electronically. Cryptologic linguists from the military services help collect signal intelligence data.

[4]These employees work with individuals rather than interpret information intercepted electronically or by other means.

[5]OPM does not maintain comprehensive records on the number of federal employees serving in positions requiring foreign language skills.

Table 1: Federal Foreign Language–Speaking Proficiency Levels

Proficiency level	Language capability requirements
0-None	No practical capability in the language.
1 – Elementary	Sufficient capability to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy and travel requirements.
2 - Limited working	Sufficient capability to meet routine social demands and limited job requirements. Can deal with concrete topics in past, present, and future tense.
3 - General professional	Able to use the language with sufficient ability to participate in most formal and informal discussions on practical, social, and professional topics. Can conceptualize and hypothesize.
4 - Advanced professional	Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs. Has range of language skills necessary for persuasion, negotiation, and counseling.
5 - Functionally native	Able to use the language at a functional level equivalent to a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker.

Note: When proficiency substantially exceeds one base skill level yet does not fully meet the criteria for the next base level, a plus sign (+) designation may be added.

Source: Compiled by GAO from Interagency Language Roundtable documents.

The difference between the second and the third proficiency levels–the ability to interact effectively with native speakers–is significant in terms of training costs and productivity. For example, the Department of Defense (DOD) expects that more than 1 year of language training is required to bring a new speaker of a hard-to-learn language such as Arabic up to the second level. Moving to the third level of proficiency generally requires practical field experience. The benefits of reaching this higher level of proficiency, however, can be substantial. U.S. government research has shown that a level-3 speaker is up to four times as productive as a speaker at level 2.

Agencies Reported Varied Foreign Language Shortages

Officials in the four agencies we reviewed—the U.S. Army, the Department of State, the Foreign Commercial Service, and the FBI—have reported varied types and degrees of foreign language shortages, depending on the agency, job position, and language. They noted shortages of translators and interpreters and people with skills in specific languages, as well as a shortfall in proficiency level among people who use foreign language skills in their jobs. The Army's greatest foreign language needs were for translators and interpreters, cryptologic linguists, and human intelligence collectors. The State Department has not filled all of its positions requiring foreign language skills. Further, the State Department does not have reliable aggregate data on whether Foreign Service officers currently serving in positions requiring foreign language ability have the appropriate language skills for their position. As for the Foreign Commercial Service, although it has relatively few positions that require foreign language proficiency, it had significant shortfalls in personnel with skills in six critical languages.[6] While the FBI does not have a set number of positions for its special agent linguists, these agents must have some level of foreign language proficiency they can use in conducting investigations. When identified by language, FBI staffing and proficiency data are classified.

Foreign language shortages can, in part, be traced to technology advances that allow the collection of growing amounts of information, rising proficiency requirements attributable to greater involvement in global activities, and an increasingly competitive job market that makes attracting and retaining qualified staff more difficult. Agency officials noted that these shortages have hindered prosecution of fraud cases and efforts to identify, arrest, and convict violent gang members; resulted in less effective representation of U.S. interests abroad; and resulted in less timely interpretation and translation of intercepted materials possibly related to terrorism or national security threats.

[6]The FCS manages a relatively small operation compared with the other organizations we reviewed. The FCS is charged with the promotion of goods and services from the United States and the protection of U.S. business interests abroad. This work is carried out by foreign commercial officers stationed at 160 overseas posts located in commercial centers throughout the world.

Agencies Reported Shortages of Translators and Interpreters

Most of the agencies we reviewed experienced shortages in both translators and interpreters, with the Army reporting some of the most acute shortages. The State Department reported shortages but used large numbers of contract translators and interpreters; the Foreign Commercial Service used contract translators and interpreters when needed; and the FBI supplemented its staff of full-time translators and interpreters with numerous contract linguists.

- The Army provided data only on translator and interpreter positions for six languages it considers critical: Arabic, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Persian-Farsi, Russian, and Spanish (we excluded Spanish from our analysis, because the Army has a surplus of Spanish language translators and interpreters). As shown in table 2, the Army had authorization for 329 translator and interpreter positions for these five languages in fiscal year 2001 but filled only 183 of them, leaving a shortfall of 146 (44 percent).

Table 2: Shortfalls of Army Translators and Interpreters, by Language, Fiscal Year 2001

	Authorized positions	Filled positions	Unfilled positions	Percent shortfall
Arabic	84	42	42	50%
Korean	62	39	23	37
Mandarin Chinese	52	32	20	38
Persian-Farsi	40	13	27	68
Russian	91	57	34	37
Total	**329**	**183**	**146**	**44**

Source: Army response to GAO data collection instrument.

The Army supplemented its translator and interpreter staff with contractors to meet intermittent and ongoing work needs. For example, the Army has had more than 1,000 contract linguists serving in Bosnia and Kosovo over the past few years.

- The State Department had 50 authorized translator and interpreter positions for fiscal year 2001, of which 37 were filled, creating a 26 percent shortfall. However, it had more than 1,800 translators and interpreters who could be called upon as needed.

- FCS does not have established translator and interpreter positions and therefore relies on locally hired employees and its commercial officers for these tasks. If these individuals are unavailable, FCS will use contractors for translation and interpretation services.

- The FBI had 415 authorized translator and interpreter positions in fiscal year 2001, 360 of which were filled—a 13 percent shortfall. The FBI also had a contract workforce of 463 translators and interpreters, who it reported were provided with part- to full-time employment. For fiscal year 2003, the FBI has requested 96 full-time translators and interpreters in addition to the 415 authorized translator and interpreter positions.

Agencies Reported Shortages of Staff with Foreign Language Skills

For the four agencies we reviewed, foreign language skills also fell short in several other areas. These included Army cryptologic linguists and human intelligence collectors, State Department Foreign Service officers, Commerce Department Foreign Commercial Service officers, and FBI special agent linguists. Individuals who fill these positions have different skills from translators and interpreters in that they may require a lower level of proficiency in a foreign language to do their job successfully. For example, a State Department Foreign Service officer working abroad may need such skills at the second or third level of proficiency to interact with local authorities, collect information, and converse socially, while translators and interpreters generally need to be at least at the third level or higher.

The Army

For fiscal year 2002, the Army has designated approximately 15,000 positions as requiring language proficiency. These positions span approximately 62 languages and cover active duty, National Guard, and Reserve personnel. The Army has two language proficiency standards: memorized proficiency for Special Forces personnel and basic linguist skills for other Army positions requiring foreign language skills.

In fiscal year 2001, the Army had a shortfall of cryptologic linguists in two of the six foreign languages it viewed as most critical—Korean and Mandarin Chinese. Overall, there were 142 unfilled positions, which amounted to a 25 percent shortfall in cryptologic linguists in these two languages. Table 3 provides data on these shortfalls, by language.

Table 3: Shortfalls of Army Cryptologic Linguists, by Language, Fiscal Year 2001

Language	Authorized positions	Filled positions	Unfilled positions	Percent shortfall
Korean	434	331	103	24%
Mandarin Chinese	144	105	39	27
Total	**578**	**436**	**142**	**25**

Source: U.S. Army response to GAO data collection instrument.

The Army also had a shortfall of human intelligence collectors in five of the six foreign languages it viewed as most critical in this area—Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin Chinese.[7] Overall, there were 108 unfilled positions, which amounted to a 13 percent shortfall in these five languages. The greatest number of unfilled human intelligence collector positions was in Arabic, but the largest percentage shortfall was in Mandarin Chinese. Table 4 provides data on these shortfalls, by language.

Table 4: Shortfalls of Army Human Intelligence Collectors, by Language, Fiscal Year 2001

Language	Authorized positions	Filled positions	Unfilled positions	Percent shortfall
Arabic	209	170	39	19%
Russian	205	197	8	4
Spanish	181	163	18	10
Korean	174	149	25	14
Mandarin Chinese	58	40	18	31
Total	**827**	**719**	**108**	**13**

Source: U.S. Army response to GAO data collection instrument.

The State Department

As of July 2001, the State Department had 2,581 positions, or 29 percent of all Foreign Service positions, designated as requiring some level of foreign language proficiency. These positions spanned 64 languages. The department acknowledged that it continues to have a shortfall of Foreign

[7]There was no shortfall in Persian-Farsi speakers.

Service officers who meet the language requirements for their positions. The reported figures regarding these shortfalls varied considerably, however, from a high of 50 percent who did not meet the requirements to a low of 16 percent. These figures appeared in two State Department reports—one in January 2001 and the other in March 2001. When asked to explain these discrepancies, State Department officials noted that some of its personnel databases have coding errors. The officials said that they hoped to have accurate information on staff meeting the foreign language proficiency requirements for these positions shortly. In commenting on a draft of this report, the State Department indicated that it is now preparing reports to the Congress using the language capabilities of staff assigned in the current year. According to the State Department, it is relying on a hand count by the responsible office using primary records to prepare these reports.

State Department officials noted that all the foreign languages used at U.S. embassies are considered critical. However, certain languages are deemed harder to learn or fill. For example, the department pays incentives to encourage people to pursue the five languages that require the longest amount of time to learn (nearly 2 years)—Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, and Cantonese Chinese. Vacancies in these positions in July 2001 are listed in table 5.

Table 5: State Department Positions and Vacancies for Five Hard-to-Learn Languages, July 2001

Language	Number of language-designated positions	Number of vacant positions	Percent of positions vacant
Mandarin Chinese	178	8	4%
Arabic	112	7	6
Japanese	50	2	4
Korean	29	4	14
Cantonese Chinese	1	0	0
Total	**370**	**21**	**6**

Source: State Department data.

Foreign Commercial Service

Overall, at the FCS, there were 155 overseas positions for permanent staff that required proficiency in a total of 23 foreign languages. As seen in table

6, the FCS had significant shortfalls in staff that required foreign language proficiency in 6 hard-to-fill languages—55 percent as of April 2001. In these 6 languages—Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Indonesian, Korean, and Turkish—unfilled positions ranged from 33 percent (for Korean and Turkish speakers) to 71 percent (for Russian speakers). FCS management noted that in determining an employee's assignment, it focused on business acumen first and the willingness of an employee to learn a language second.

Table 6: Shortfalls of FCS Officers, by Language, as of April 2001

Language	Authorized positions	Filled positions	Unfilled positions	Percent shortfall
Mandarin Chinese	31	15	16	52%
Russian	14	4	10	71
Japanese	16	7	9	56
Indonesian	4	2	2	50
Korean	3	2	1	33
Turkish	3	2	1	33
Total	**71**	**32**	**39**	**55**

Note: Because of the small size of the FCS, some of the percentages are calculated on a small number of positions. Figures for FCS in the table refer only to 6 hard-to-fill languages. The comparable shortfall for the 23 languages used by FCS personnel is 45 percent.

Source: FCS response to GAO data collection instrument.

In commenting on this report, the FCS said that 27 of the 39 positions listed in table 6 as unfilled were staffed by individuals whose foreign language abilities were below the required levels. The FCS reported that 7 of the 27 individuals in the "unfilled positions" had valid test scores in Mandarin Chinese when they were assigned, but these scores expired while they were abroad. The FCS plans to retest the individuals when they are in the United States for home leave or reassignment (tested foreign language proficiency is generally valid for 5 years). The other 12 positions remained vacant.

The FBI

In fiscal year 2001, the FBI had 1,792 special agents with foreign language skills in more than 40 languages. The FBI refers to these agents as "special agent linguists." They interview suspects and develop informants,[8] sometimes performing these duties in a foreign language. The Bureau does not set a staffing goal for special agents with foreign language skills, however, making it impossible to calculate shortfall figures. As seen in table 7, close to half of the Bureau's special agents with foreign language skills have attained a "general professional level" (level 3) or higher degree of foreign language proficiency. FBI officials said many of the special agents listed as having no foreign language proficiency are currently receiving language training.

Table 7: FBI Special Agent Linguists' Foreign Language–Proficiency Levels, Fiscal Year 2001

Proficiency level	Number of agents	Percent of total
Level 0-none	169	9%
Level 1- elementary	322	18
Level 2-limited working	512	29
Level 3- general professional	468	26
Level 4-advanced professional	257	14
Level 5- functionally native	64	4
Total	**1,792**	**100**

Source: FBI response to GAO data collection instrument.

Several Factors Have Contributed to Changing Agency Needs

The Army and the FBI face a dramatic increase in the volume of intelligence data available for analysis because of technological advances in data collection. Where past intelligence data–gathering focused on capturing line-of-sight radio communications or FBI wiretaps, information can now be collected from other sources such as fiber-optic cables, cell phones, and the Internet. For example, the head of the FBI's Language Services Section stated that new technology is expected to increase the volume of foreign language work by as much as 30 percent each year. She added that the volume of foreign language material generated from

[8]Included in this group are special agent linguists serving as legal attachés at 44 embassies outside the United States.

computers and other types of technology has outstripped the Bureau's ability to find and hire the qualified linguists needed to review and interpret the information.

Agency officials we spoke with also stated that the number of languages required and the proficiency levels have both increased as the agencies have pursued more complex and diverse missions within the context of evolving operating environments. The Army, for example, used to focus on long-term threats from a few countries about which much was known but now must respond to conflicts in less well-known areas on relatively short notice. FBI officials stated that the Bureau increasingly focuses on international matters such as terrorism, drug trafficking, organized crime, and money laundering. U.S. intelligence missions have also increased in scope and complexity as the number and diversity of threats to U.S. security have risen.

In addition, agency officials stated that a competitive job market makes attracting and retaining qualified staff more difficult. The Army pointed out that retaining qualified cryptologic linguists is a problem, because these individuals have attractive educational options such as college and private-sector opportunities, where their language skills are in demand. Because of the high turnover in cryptologic linguists (fewer than 50 percent stay beyond their initial 4 to 6 year tour), the military services must continue to focus on basic language training.

Impact of Language Shortages on Agency Operations

Agency officials stated that foreign language shortages have adversely affected agency operations and compromised U.S. military, law enforcement, intelligence, counterterrorism, and diplomatic efforts.[9] Although it is sometimes difficult to link knowledge of a foreign language to a specific negative outcome or event, some agency officials were able to provide examples of the impact that language shortages had on agency operations.

- In terms of hindering prosecution of fraudulent activity, FBI officials noted that the assistant U.S. attorney in Miami, Florida, in charge of

[9]See *The State of Foreign Language Capabilities in National Security and the Federal Government*, Hearing before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14 and 19, 2000).

health care fraud investigations recently advised the Bureau that his office will decline to prosecute health care fraud cases unless timely translations of monitored Spanish conversations are turned over to the Office of the U.S. Attorney. The Miami metropolitan area has the largest ongoing health care fraud investigation in the country, with Medicare and Medicaid losses to the U.S. government estimated by the FBI to be in excess of $3 billion.

- In terms of identifying, arresting, and convicting violent gang members, the FBI's Los Angeles office cited a critical need for Spanish language specialists and language monitors to work on these cases. According to the Bureau, the ability to target violent gang members will save lives in Los Angeles but is contingent on the availability of linguists to work these investigations.

- In terms of less effective representation of U.S. interests abroad, the deputy director of State's National Foreign Affairs Training Center testified in September 2000 that foreign language proficiency shortfalls have contributed to a lack of diplomatic readiness.[10] This problem results in less effective representation and advocacy of U.S. interests abroad; a loss of U.S. exports, investments, and jobs; and a weakening of the fight against international terrorism and drug trafficking.

- In terms of potential gaps in U.S. efforts to thwart terrorism, the FBI has raised concern over the thousands of hours of audiotapes and pages of written material that have not been reviewed or translated because of a lack of qualified linguists. Likewise, a senior Central Intelligence Agency official speaking for the wider intelligence community said that thousands of technical papers that provide details on foreign research and development in scientific and technical areas currently go untranslated, because intelligence agencies lack the personnel to interpret the material.[11] The Army noted that linguist shortfalls affect its readiness to conduct current and anticipated military and other missions. As an example, the Army said that it does not have the

[10]Statement by the deputy director, National Foreign Affairs Training Center, Department of State, before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 14, 2000).

[11]Statement by the vice chairman, National Intelligence Council, before the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services (Sept. 14, 2000).

linguistic capacity to support two concurrent major theaters of war, as planners require.

Agencies Use a Variety of Strategies to Meet Their Foreign Language Needs

The agencies we reviewed pursue three general strategies to meet their foreign language needs. First, agencies focus on staff development by training staff in foreign languages, providing pay incentives for individuals using those skills, and ensuring an attractive career path for linguists or language-proficient employees. Second, agencies make use of external resources. This can include contracting staff as needed; recruiting native or U.S.–trained language speakers; or drawing on the expertise of other agency staff, reservists, or retirees. Third, several agencies have begun to use technology to leverage limited staff resources, including developing databases of contract linguists, employing language translation software, and performing machine screening of collected data. Figure 1 provides an overview of these categories and related strategies.

Figure 1: Strategies That Four U.S. Agencies Use to Address Foreign Language Shortages and Shortfalls

	Staff development			External management of resources				Other
Agency	Language training	Pay incentives	Attractive career path for linguists	Contract staff	Recruitment of native language speakers	Recruitment of language-capable employees	Other agency staff, reservists, and retirees	Technology
Army	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
State	●	●	●	●		●[a]		●
FCS	●	●	NA	●		●[b]		
FBI	●	●	●	●		●	●	●

● Agency uses strategy

Note: NA = not applicable, since the FCS does not hire staff linguists.

[a]State's Office of Language Services recruits and hires skilled linguists; however, foreign language skills are not required to apply for Foreign Service positions.

[b]At the FCS, hard-to-fill language-designated positions are sometimes filled by individuals who are recruited and hired as noncareer limited appointees who have needed language skills.

Source: GAO analysis.

Language Training

All four agencies we reviewed used foreign language training as a key strategy to meet their foreign language needs. Training costs represented a significant program expense at those four agencies. For example, according to an Army contractor, the Army spends approximately $27,000 over a year-long period to train one cryptologic linguist to the target proficiency of level 2 in a more difficult language such as Chinese or Korean. The Army spent approximately $27.3 million on foreign language training through the Defense Language Institute's training facilities in fiscal year 2001, according to a senior program analyst at the Institute. According to the State Department's director for human resources policy coordination, the department spent $23.1 million in fiscal year 2000 on language training through the Foreign Service Institute. Additional language training is available to State employees serving overseas through the department's post language program. In fiscal year 2000, the FCS sent staff to State's Foreign Service Institute and used local contract schools, at an estimated annual cost of just under $500,000. In fiscal year 2001, the FBI utilized the Foreign Service Institute and contract services, at a total estimated cost of $1.4 million. For some positions, foreign language skills were viewed as making an important contribution to job performance but were not mandatory for hiring purposes. Once employees were hired, however, agencies were willing to devote substantial resources to developing employee language skills.

Pay Incentives

All four agencies also used pay incentives to motivate staff to gain expertise in hard-to-learn languages or to maintain their language skills at a designated minimum level. According to an analyst with the Army's Foreign Language Proponency Office, the Army provides a monthly stipend of $50 to $300 to employees who are studying certain languages for language-designated positions. In fiscal year 2001, the Army spent an estimated $6.5 million on these incentives. State and the FCS have a policy to offer payment incentives of between 5 and 15 percent, depending on the level of proficiency in hard-to-learn languages, while the individual is assigned to a post where the language is used. State's Office of Language Services also pays retention bonuses to a few staff members. State Department officials noted that they have not yet evaluated whether the new incentive system to study hard-to-learn languages, which sent its first group of participants to overseas posts last summer, has helped to close skill gaps for certain target languages. The State Department and the FCS's total fiscal year 2000 budgets devoted to pay incentives came to approximately $5.3 million. As for the FBI, it provides an incentive of 5 percent of base salary to selected

special agent linguists who have a working level proficiency in a language and use that language on the job a majority of the time. In fiscal year 2001, pay incentives for the FBI totaled $721,000.

Attractive Career Path

Establishing an attractive career path for linguists was also a key strategy for some of the agencies we reviewed. However, the Army has historically experienced a low rate of retention among its language-capable staff in key positions. According to an analyst in the Army's Foreign Language Proponency Office, data on Army staff retention showed that in fiscal year 2001 more than 45 percent of cryptologic linguists left the service after completing their initial tour of duty, with up to 2 years spent in basic, foreign language, and intelligence training. The Army recognizes this is a key personnel issue and is conducting a "cradle-to-grave" review of cryptologic linguists' attrition rates. Translators and interpreters working in the State Department's Office of Language Services and the FBI have a career path that allows them to rise to positions above the GS-12 level.

Contract Staff

All the agencies we reviewed utilized contract translators and interpreters to meet some of their workforce needs. The Army Language Master Plan issued in January 2000 identified the use of contractors as a key future strategy for meeting the foreign language needs associated with small-scale conflicts. The Army concluded that its training resources do not permit preparing military staff for a wide variety of unknown and hard-to-forecast small-scale conflicts. With limited resources, the Army prefers to concentrate on major theater-of-war scenarios and a restricted number of small-scale conflict scenarios. The plan noted that the balance of the Army's small-scale conflict needs could be met with contract translators and interpreters. As for the State Department, it had a list of 1,800 contract translators and interpreters to fill intermittent assignments. In fiscal year 2000, State spending on those individuals came to $13 million. While the FCS relied primarily on its locally hired employees and its commercial officers for translation and interpretation services, the agency occasionally used contractors to supply these services. The FBI had a cadre of 463 contract translators and interpreters who generally worked an average of

16 hours per week. In fiscal year 2001, FBI costs for those individuals totaled $15 million.[12]

Recruitment of Native Language Speakers

One of the four agencies we reviewed has a targeted recruitment program aimed at native language speakers. The Army has developed a native speaker recruitment program and has dedicated 10 recruiters to this effort. The Army is increasing its focus on this particular strategy, citing the significant cost savings associated with hiring native language speakers as compared with providing 23 to 64 weeks of language training at the Defense Language Institute's Foreign Language Center. The State Department, the FCS, and the FBI do not have recruitment programs targeted at native language speakers. The State Department does not target native speakers, because it does not believe that language proficiency is the primary criterion for selecting Foreign Service officers. According to FBI and State Department officials, conducting background investigations on native speakers can be particularly difficult, because many of these individuals have lived abroad, in some cases for years.

Recruitment of Language-capable Employees

All of the agencies we reviewed recruited and hired language-capable employees. All four agencies provided additional hiring "points" to job candidates with target language skills, and some had extensive outreach programs. The Army provided enlistment bonuses to job candidates with demonstrated proficiency in target languages. The State Department's Office of Language Services recruited and hired proficient translators and interpreters after they had demonstrated their abilities as contract employees. The State Department has also recruited individuals for Foreign Service officer positions at university language departments and at meetings of foreign language associations. In addition, the department's Fascell Fellowship Program offers 2-year assignments to a few individuals proficient in languages of the former Soviet Union and China. Some of these individuals apply for the Foreign Service at the end of their fellowship assignments. The FCS has used its noncareer limited appointment authority to hire commercial officers with foreign language skills for hard-to-fill positions. These posts comprise approximately 7 to 8 percent of FCS officer positions located overseas. In addition, in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, FCS hired Foreign Commercial

[12]Army contracting costs were not readily available.

Service officers who were proficient in the languages of former Soviet Union countries. The FBI has placed a special emphasis on hiring special agents with target language skills. The Bureau has a website dedicated to recruitment, an active outreach program to academic institutions, and a new language intern program under development. The Bureau's Foreign Language Program office conducts its own recruitment efforts for both language specialists and contract translators and interpreters.

The National Security Education Program (NSEP), which is authorized by the National Security Education Act of 1991, provides federal support for advanced language training.[13] According to the NSEP's director, the program obligated approximately $3 million in fiscal year 2001 in support of 215 scholarships. The director also said that NSEP is the only government program that links U.S. national security interests with the development of foreign area and language skills. Each year, NSEP surveys federal agencies to identify critical-need languages and distributes college scholarships in line with these needs. Scholarship recipients agree to a term of federal service in national security affairs agencies in return for these funds.

Other Agency Staff, Reservists, and Retirees

Agencies also use other agency staff, reservists, and part-time appointees to meet their foreign language needs. The Army's foreign language program includes National Guard and Army Reserve language personnel. For example, the 300th Military Intelligence Brigade (Utah National Guard) has several hundred linguists available for temporary duty. The FBI makes use of other agency staff on a temporary basis to fill low-demand language needs. For example, the FBI has a memorandum of agreement with the Defense Intelligence Agency for such services. The Bureau also has a memorandum of understanding with the Army to advertise the availability of temporary-duty translator and interpreter positions in the FBI.

Technology

Technology represents another major strategy that agencies use to address and manage their foreign language shortfalls. For example, the Army has developed a new technology for collecting field intelligence that could potentially reduce its need for cryptologic linguists. According to Army officials, this technology will eventually allow signals intercepted on the

[13] 50 U.S.C., sections 1901–1910.

battlefield to be sent to a central location for translation, interpretation, and analysis, alleviating the need to have staff with foreign language skills placed in a conflict situation. The Army and the FBI also use machine "gisting" (reviewing intelligence documents to determine if they contain target key words or phrases) to better manage their workloads and target the information that trained linguists need to review in depth. In addition, both the private and the public sectors are exploring advances in machine translation of spoken and written communications. Numerous demonstration projects are under way, and early results show some promise for this type of technology. However, language experts noted that machine translation software will never be able to replace a human translator's ability to interpret fine nuances, cultural references, and the use of slang terms or idioms. Finally, State's Office of Language Services and the Foreign Service Institute use an automated translation system for translation of technical terms and consistent translation of stock phrases in diplomatic and legal documents to help human translators work more efficiently.

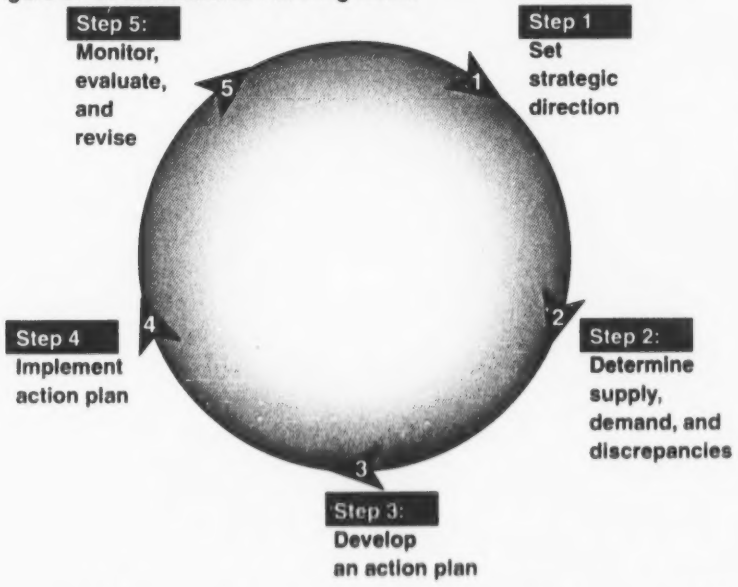
Other forms of technology, such as networked computer operations, will increasingly allow translation work to be routed to linguists regardless of their location. The FBI, for example, has established eight field translation centers to provide flexibility in assigning priority translation work throughout the FBI. The FBI is also maintaining a database, the Law Enforcement Interagency Linguist Access (LEILA) database, that is an attempt to share information on more than 1,000 contract linguists distributed among Department of Justice agencies. LEILA will list all available language contractors by specialty, language skill level, and security clearance. The FBI received $100,000 in end-of-year reallocated funds to develop LEILA for use across all Department of Justice agencies. Future plans call for LEILA to be extended to the entire intelligence community. This move would supplement other efforts to better coordinate limited foreign language resources across agency lines. For example, the Senate Committee on Intelligence has proposed expanding U.S. translating capabilities by establishing a National Virtual Translation Center to help bring together permanent agency staff and contractors. The committee expects that such a center would link secure locations maintained by the intelligence community throughout the country and would apply digital technology to network, store, retrieve, and catalogue audio and textual information. Foreign intelligence could then be collected

in one location, translated in a second location, and provided to an intelligence analyst in a third location.[14]

Some Agencies Lack Workforce Planning as a Long-term Strategy for Filling Language Needs

Despite the variety of actions taken by the agencies we reviewed, gaps in foreign language skills exist. To help fill such gaps, some agencies have begun to adopt a strategic approach to human capital management and workforce planning that reflects the elements in OPM's 1999 Workforce Planning Model, as outlined in figure 2. The model's five steps, which are further defined in appendix II, provide a general framework to understand workforce planning. Although our data collection instrument asked how agencies are implementing these steps, it became clear in reviewing the documentation provided that the first step—setting a strategic direction—is a process that is handled differently at each agency. Therefore, we focused our review primarily on steps 2 through 5 in the model.

Figure 2: OPM Workforce Planning Model



Source: OPM's Workforce Planning Model (http://www.opm.gov/workforceplanning/wfpmodel.htm).

[14]Senate Report No. 107-63, at 11.

Applying OPM's model to the agencies we examined, we found that the FBI has most closely followed the model. In contrast, the Army, the State Department, and the FCS have not yet implemented the full workforce planning model. The latter agencies have focused their efforts on identifying the gaps in foreign language needs but have not developed an overall strategy, including implementation and monitoring plans.

In addition to the OPM model, GAO, the president, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) also have issued policy statements and guidance reinforcing the importance of sound human capital management and workforce planning. GAO's guidance emphasizes the use of a self-assessment checklist for better aligning human capital with strategic planning and core business practices.[15] OMB's guidance stresses that agencies should seek to address shortages of skills by conducting thorough workforce analyses.[16] Agencies have also been encouraged to identify additional authorities or flexibilities they might need to remove current obstacles and barriers to effective workforce management (for additional information on human capital management and workforce planning guidance, see app. II).

The FBI Has Implemented a Strategic Approach

The FBI has instituted a strategic workforce plan (step 1) and made efforts to implement the five steps in the OPM model. The Bureau's fiscal year 2001–2004 strategic plan cites the critical need for foreign languages to support specific FBI missions. The Bureau's Foreign Language Program plan determines supply, demand, and discrepancies, along with specific goals and objectives (steps 2 and 3). This supports an action plan that includes performance measures and priority actions (step 3) regarding foreign language hiring, training, and related technology (step 4). We found that this program plan was supported by detailed reports from field offices that documented the Bureau's foreign language needs. These reports were reviewed along with workload statistics from the FBI's regional offices (step 5).

Despite the FBI's strategic planning and follow-up efforts, its requested Foreign Language Program budget enhancements have not always been considered a high priority within the Department of Justice. For example,

[15]See *Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders.*

[16]OMB Bulletin No. 01-07, issued May 8, 2001.

in fiscal year 2000, these enhancements ranked 45 out of a list of 120 budget increase requests within the Bureau. The comparable rankings for fiscal years 2001 and 2002 were 32 out of 112 and 42 out of 114 budget increase requests, respectively. For fiscal year 2003, the Bureau is changing its budget prioritization process, and the Foreign Language Program has risen to number 3 out of 42 ranked priorities.

Army Has Yet to Implement Strategic Language Planning

With regard to the OPM model, the Army has limited its efforts to developing a plan partially outlining a strategic direction and identifying its available supply and demand for staff with foreign language skills (addressing only steps 1 and 2 of the OPM model). With regard to the Army's strategic planning, in January 2000 it issued phase one of the Army Language Master Plan, which provided an assessment of the composition, location, and proficiency level of Army staff with language capabilities. In February 2000, the Army Audit Agency issued a report that commented on phase one of the Army's Language Master Plan.[17] The report recommended that the Army develop an overall strategic plan that identifies foreign language program goals, objectives, and performance measures. In response, the Army noted that it would update the Language Master Plan to include the elements of a strategic plan.

[17]Army Foreign Language Program Requirements, Audit Report: AA00-32 (Washington, D.C.: Army Audit Agency, Feb. 2000).

In theory, the Army had an opportunity to update its phase one plan or phase two of the plan that was released for comment on July 12, 2001,[18] but it did not do so. According to our analysis, both the phase one and phase two plans were never updated to incorporate an action plan (step 3) or devise any follow-on activities (steps 4 and 5). In responding to our data collection instrument, the Army acknowledged that the Language Master Plan does not include specific goals and performance expectations linked to its human capital strategies. [19]

State and FCS Workforce Planning Efforts Have Just Begun

Workforce planning as it relates to addressing foreign language skills has yet to be fully developed at the State Department and the FCS. The State Department has not yet prepared a separate strategic plan for developing foreign language skills or a related action plan designed to correct proficiency shortfalls that date back at least to the mid-1970s (step 1). State Department officials' response to our survey noted that language is such an integral part of the department's operations that a separate planning effort for foreign language skills is not needed.

[18]Among the initiatives the Army lists in phase two is a "cradle-to-grave" review of its cryptologic linguists to seek ways to reduce high attrition rates. This complex effort involves a number of recruitment, training, and career development initiatives. Other initiatives concern the use of new technology such as a field intelligence collection system, which could reduce the need for 900 cryptologic linguist positions.

[19]In addition to the Army's planning efforts, there are two ongoing Department of Defense strategic human resource initiatives that may influence the Army's planning efforts. One effort aims to develop a comprehensive human resources plan for the entire Department of Defense. A second effort focuses on an eight-part strategic plan for utilizing the department's foreign language resources.

The American Foreign Service Association recently prepared a study of workforce planning at the State Department. The Association noted in recommendations to the Congress that despite the availability of language training at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute, there are institutional barriers that prevent State Department staff from receiving the training they need. The Association wrote that State Department managers often did not allow adequate time for training when assigning staff to positions requiring language skills. Managers often had to choose between accepting not-fully-proficient personnel immediately or suffering long gaps while waiting for staff to complete their training. The Association urged the Congress to require State to prepare a needs-based workforce plan with a 4-year projection. State's authorization act for fiscal years 2000 and 2001[20] then directed the State Department to submit such a workforce plan, describing its projected personnel needs by grade and by skill category.

The State Department's workforce plan focused primarily on hiring and promotion requirements and on the additional personnel needed to allow for training opportunities for staff. The plan cited a need for 46 additional positions, at a cost of $4.8 million, but it did not identify how specific foreign language proficiency needs could be met by adding these positions (partially addressing step 3). State officials said that a funding request for these and other positions was included in the department's fiscal year 2002 and that the Congress has fully funded this portion of the budget.[21] State officials noted that their workforce planning effort is a first step toward the development of a fully integrated workforce planning system.

Despite the lack of a foreign language strategic plan, the State Department addresses step 2 in the workforce planning model through its annual survey of ambassadors regarding foreign language needs at their posts on a position-by-position basis. This results in a list of positions identified as requiring foreign language skills by position, e.g., a political officer at the U.S. embassy in Moscow with a specific level of expertise in Russian.

Similarly, the FCS has not developed a workforce plan that addresses how it will meet its foreign language needs. FCS management has convened a task force to begin assessing its organizational needs, including its need for

[20]Public Law 106-113, section 326, 113 stat. 1501A-437.

[21]See House Report (Conference) 107-278, at 145, accompanying Public Law 107-77, 115 Stat. 783.

language-proficient staff. In the FCS's response to our data collection instrument, these early efforts were identified as being in an "embryonic" state of development. FCS officials noted that their workforce plan will ultimately be incorporated into the workforce plan of the Department of Commerce. However, every 3 years the FCS surveys its senior officers regarding a post's foreign language needs (step 2 of the workforce planning model).

Conclusions

Personnel with foreign language skills are needed in a range of federal agency programs and missions. In light of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the importance of foreign language skills will increase as the United States expands its efforts to counter terrorist activities. The federal agencies we reviewed face shortages of translators and interpreters, as well as staff with other foreign language skills. These shortages strain agency operations that depend in part on language-skilled employees to meet increasingly complex missions. Agencies have pursued strategies such as training, targeted recruitment efforts, and contracting to fill documented skill gaps. However, these strategies have not been completely effective in closing those gaps. As a result, some agencies have begun to take a more strategic and results-oriented approach to managing their workforce needs.

The OPM's five-step model for conducting human capital management and workforce planning provides one method for managing agency workforce needs. The FBI has developed and is implementing an action plan in keeping with the OPM's 1999 workforce planning model to help fill their shortages. While the Army has developed detailed assessments of its needs for staff with foreign language skills, these planning efforts fall short of the strategic planning approach called for by the OPM's model. The State Department and FCS have just begun their workforce planning efforts and have yet to develop strategic plans of action. Without a specific strategic direction and a related action plan that effectively implements the strategies these agencies intend to use to correct shortages in foreign language skills, it will be difficult for the agencies to fill current and projected shortages.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To improve the overall management of foreign language resources and to better address current and projected shortages in foreign language skills, we recommend that the secretary of the army, the secretary of state, and

the director general of the FCS adopt a strategic, results-oriented approach to human capital management and workforce planning. This approach should include setting a strategic direction, assessing agency gaps in foreign language skills, developing a corrective plan of action, and monitoring the implementation and success of this action plan.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We received written comments on a draft of this report from the Army, the Department of State, the Foreign Commercial Service, and the FBI. These comments and GAO's responses to specific points are reprinted in appendixes III through VI, respectively. All four agencies agreed with our overall findings. The Army said it agreed with our recommendation but objected to a perceived requirement that OPM and GAO guidance must serve as the models for developing a strategic approach to human capital management. It based this objection on the fact that there are differences among DOD and non-DOD foreign language requirements, and that agencies should be given the latitude to use an approach that best meets their particular needs. The State Department expressed similar concerns and provided a list of activities and initiatives that it believes are responsive to our recommendation. The Foreign Commercial Service agreed with our recommendation.

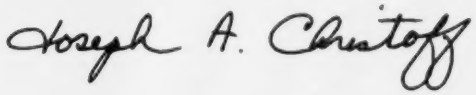
To address the Army and State's concern, we revised our recommendation to clarify that it focused on the core human capital and workforce planning principles promoted by the OPM and the GAO. These principles should serve as the basis for the more detailed human capital efforts agencies design to address their unique needs.

While the State Department's actions should offer some benefits, they do not fully address each of the core principles contained in our report recommendation. The State Department has partially addressed one of these principles by documenting its foreign language skills needs on an annual basis. However, as discussed in our report, the department has had difficulties in generating a consistent measure of its actual language shortfalls because of inadequate departmentwide data on the number of positions filled with qualified language staff. With regard to the other core principles, the State Department still needs to set a strategic direction for its foreign language needs, develop an action plan for correcting foreign language shortfalls, and institute a monitoring process to assess action plan implementation and performance.

All four agencies provided technical or administrative comments that, where appropriate, have been incorporated throughout the report.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly release its content earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies of the report to congressional committees with responsibilities for foreign affairs issues, the secretary of state, the director general of the Foreign Commercial Service, members of the House-Senate International Education Study Group, and interested congressional committees. Copies will be made available to others on request.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8979. Other GAO contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix VII.



Joseph A. Christoff
Director, International Affairs and Trade

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

At the request of Senators Thad Cochran and Christopher J. Dodd and Representatives James A. Leach and Sam Farr (members of the House-Senate International Education Study Group), we reviewed the use of foreign language skills at four federal agencies: the U.S. Army, the Department of State, the Department of Commerce's Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).[22] Specifically, we (1) examined the nature and impact of reported foreign language shortages, (2) determined the strategies that agencies use to address these specific shortages, and (3) assessed the efforts of agencies to implement an overall strategic workforce plan to address current and projected shortages.

To understand the nature and impact of reported foreign language shortages in the federal government, we first met with officials from the Department of Defense (DOD), the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of Justice, the FBI, the Department of State, the FCS, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Foreign Agricultural Service, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the U.S. Immigration Service, the U.S. Customs Bureau, the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, the Office of the Chief Immigration Judge, the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Peace Corps. We also met with officials from the National Foreign Language Center to discuss broad policy issues and met with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) officials to obtain information on its central personnel data file and data collected on government translators, interpreters, and foreign language--required positions. We also requested a briefing from the Central Intelligence Agency to learn more about its central coordinating role for foreign language issues in the intelligence community. The Central Intelligence Agency declined to meet with GAO.

Based on our review of these agencies' programs, we selected the U.S. Army, the State Department, the FCS, and the FBI for further review. We selected these programs on the basis of the size of their programs and the diversity of their missions. To determine the nature and extent of reported foreign language shortages at these agencies, we met with officials from each agency, reviewed and analyzed agency workforce planning

[22]We issued a separate For Official Use Only report which included details on National Security Agency/Central Security Service operations. We also issued a separate classified report which provides staffing details on the National Security Agency/Central Security Service and the FBI's foreign language programs.

documents, and developed a data collection instrument that we asked agency staff to complete. The State Department provided only partial information on foreign language shortages in their responses.

To determine the strategies that the four agencies use to address the foreign language shortages, we met with officials from each agency, reviewed agency documents related to foreign language programs, and analyzed responses to the questions on these strategies that were posed in our data collection instrument.

To assess the efforts at the four agencies to develop and implement strategic workforce plans to address current and projected foreign language shortages, we reviewed applicable workforce planning documents and guidance issued by the OPM, the GAO, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the National Academy of Public Administration, and the American Foreign Service Association. We also analyzed responses to questions on agency workforce planning that were included in our data collection instrument. In addition, we obtained, reviewed, and analyzed available agency workforce planning documents.

We did our work primarily in the Washington, D.C., area. We also visited the Defense Language Institute, the Defense Manpower Data Center, and the Language Line Services in Monterey, California, to observe the Army's language training program, the Department of Defense's human resource data collection service, and the commercial linguistic services that can be used by U.S. government agencies. We also met with officials to discuss Army intelligence activities at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

We performed our work from November 2000 through October 2001, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Human Capital Management and Workforce Planning Guidance

The Office of Personnel Management, GAO, and the Office of Management and Budget have developed guidance for managing human capital and planning workforce strategy. This appendix discusses each agency's guidance.

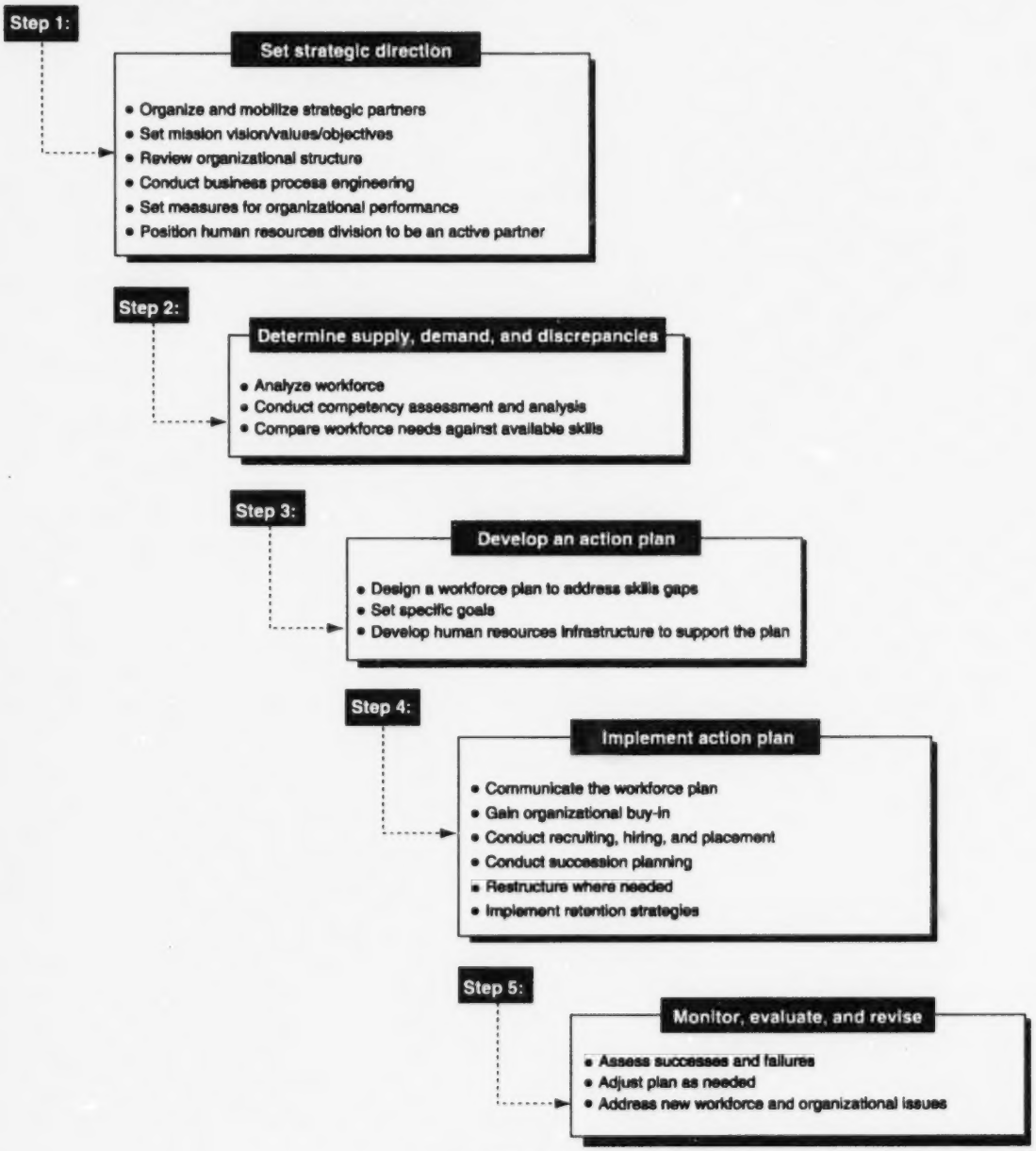
OPM Guidance

OPM plays an important role in promoting effective human capital management and workforce planning across the federal government. OPM notes that the strategic planning requirements of the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act (P.L. 103-62) provides a framework for agencies to integrate their human capital planning into their broader strategic and program planning efforts.[23]

OPM has developed a Workforce Planning Model (illustrated in our main report) to help the agency manage its human capital resources more strategically. The executive branch has identified this model as a key tool to help agencies meet the president's and OMB's human capital management initiatives. The model is organized into five key steps and a number of related substeps, as noted in figure 3.

[23]See OPM's *Strategic Human Resources Management: Aligning with the Mission* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Sept. 1999).

Figure 3: Steps in OPM's Workforce Planning Model


Step 1:
Set strategic direction
• Organize and mobilize strategic partners
• Set mission vision/values/objectives
• Review organizational structure
• Conduct business process engineering
• Set measures for organizational performance
• Position human resources division to be an active partner
Step 2:
Determine supply, demand, and discrepancies
• Analyze workforce
• Conduct competency assessment and analysis
• Compare workforce needs against available skills
Step 3:
Develop an action plan
• Design a workforce plan to address skills gaps
• Set specific goals
• Develop human resources infrastructure to support the plan
Step 4:
Implement action plan
• Communicate the workforce plan
• Gain organizational buy-in
• Conduct recruiting, hiring, and placement
• Conduct succession planning
• Restructure where needed
• Implement retention strategies
Step 5:
Monitor, evaluate, and revise
• Assess successes and failures
• Adjust plan as needed
• Address new workforce and organizational issues

Source: OPM's Workforce Planning Model (http://www.opm.gov/workforceplanning/wfpmodel.htm).

OPM has also developed a Human Resource Innovators' Tool Kit and a related guide, in part to alert agency planners to the range of personnel flexibilities and authorities they already have at their disposal to help manage human capital challenges such as current and projected skill gaps.[24] OPM and GAO have encouraged agencies to consider all available flexibilities and authorities in pursuing creative solutions to long-standing problems.

GAO Guidance

To help focus attention on the importance of human capital management and workforce planning, we recently added strategic human capital management to the list of federal programs and operations we identified as "high risk."[25] We have developed a human capital self-assessment checklist based on work with leading private- and public-sector organizations.[26] The checklist covers a suggested five-part framework that includes strategic planning, organizational alignment, leadership, talent, and establishment of a performance culture. The checklist was designed to help agency leaders review their human capital programs and to provide a means for agency leaders to put the spotlight on improving the alignment of human capital management with strategic planning and core business practices.

OMB Guidance

OMB, consistent with the President's Fiscal Year 2002 Management Agenda,[27] has issued guidance[28] to agencies on governmentwide human capital management and workforce planning. The president's agenda includes the strategic management of employees as one of five key governmentwide initiatives. To begin the process of implementing this initiative, OMB requested that federal agencies develop preliminary workforce analyses by June 29, 2001. These analyses are intended, among

[24]See *Human Resource Innovators' Tool Kit and Human Resources Flexibilities and Authorities in the Federal Government* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001).

[25]*High-Risk Series: An Update* (GAO-01-263, Jan. 2001).

[26]*Human Capital: A Self-Assessment Checklist for Agency Leaders* (GAO/OGC-00-14G, Sept. 2000).

[27]*The President's Management Agenda (Fiscal Year 2002)* (Washington, D.C.: Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget).

[28]OMB Bulletin No. 01-07, issued May 8, 2001.

other things, to document their current employment patterns, expected retirement trends, and actions they plan to take to correct anticipated skills surpluses and needs over the next 5 years. Significantly, OMB's guidance also calls for agency observations on barriers (statutory, administrative, physical, or cultural) that prevent or hinder agency reform and management efforts. The executive branch has signaled a willingness to work with federal agencies and the Congress to address such barriers.

OMB has further instructed agencies that as part of their fiscal year 2003 budget submission and annual performance plan, they should develop a 5-year workforce restructuring plan designed to streamline and better align their workforce to serve agency missions, goals, and objectives more effectively. OMB guidance notes that the restructuring plan should include specific organizational changes, potential cost savings, human resources management tools and flexibilities needed to implement the plan, specific actions to be taken and associated timetables, and agency plans for monitoring progress.

Comments from the U.S. Army

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

PERSONNEL AND READINESS

Mr. Joseph Christoff
Director, International Affairs and Trade
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Christoff:

This is the Department of Defense response to your draft report, "FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls," dated November 26, 2001 (GAO Code 320022/GAO-02-237).

In general, the Department concurs with the report. However, we have identified certain issues and recommendations for clarification or correction, as well as technical changes, which should be incorporated into the final report. Note that portions of the attachment are marked "UNCLASSIFIED/FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY (U/FOUO)" to denote sensitive material.

See comment 1.

The management of foreign language assets is an area of the Secretary's interest and emphasis; it also represents an important component of the Human Resource Strategic Plan now being prepared to shape the next issuance of Defense Planning Guidance. However, we are concerned that the report fails to make critical operational distinctions between DoD's foreign language requirements and those of other Federal agencies reviewed - -for example, human intelligence (HUMINT) collection and tactical intelligence operations requiring interpreters and translators and cryptologic linguists in a battlefield environment. There are clear distinctions in these requirements which are lost in this report, thus not providing an accurate representation of the difference between DoD and non-DoD issues. One possible solution may be to restructure the report into "DoD" and "Non-DoD" sections.

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Additionally, in several instances the report implied that the National Security Agency (NSA), failed to provide information requested. In most cases, the information requested was classified thereby restricting its further release. For further information my point of contact is Mr. Brad Loo, 695-6312, or email Bradford.Loo@osd.mil.

Sincerely,

David S. C. Chu

GAO DRAFT REPORT GAO-02-237
DATED NOVEMBER 26, 2001
(GAO Code 320022)

"FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of the Army adopt a strategic, results-oriented approach to human capital management and workforce planning as described in OPM's model and GAO's self assessment checklist.
(p. 29/GAO Draft Report)

See comment 2.

DOD RESPONSE: The Department of Defense concurs with the portion of the recommendation that the Secretary of the Army adopt a strategic, results-oriented approach to human capital management and workforce planning in order to better address current and projected shortages in their foreign language skills.

The Department of Defense agrees with the Army that adoption of the OPM model or the GAO self assessment checklists would be premature – what may work for the FBI may not be appropriate for the Army. At the same time, the Department recognizes that sound management of foreign language assets is important to Defense performance, and this topic will be addressed as part of the development of the Human Resource Strategic Plan now being prepared to shape the next issuance of Defense Planning Guidance.

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The following are GAO's comments on the Department of Defense's letter dated January 17, 2002. (Note: DOD's response included an addendum with Unclassified/For Official Use Only comments that are not reprinted in this report. However, these additional comments are addressed in this report, where appropriate.)

GAO Comments

1. We did not modify our report because we do not believe these operational distinctions affect our report findings, conclusions, or recommendation.

2. We revised our recommendation to clarify that it focuses on the core planning principles promoted by OPM and GAO rather than the detailed implementation steps recommended by each agency. These principles should serve as the basis for the detailed human capital programs that agencies design to meet their unique needs.

Comments from the Department of State

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

United States Department of State

Chief Financial Officer

Washington, D.C. 20520-7427

DEC 18 2001

Dear Ms. Westin:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls," GAO-02-237, GAO Job Code 320022.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Laura Hall, Policy Coordination Staff, Bureau of Human Resources, at (202) 647-2665.

Sincerely,

Larry J. Eisenhart
Acting

Enclosure:

As stated.

cc: GAO/IAT - Mr. Christoff
State/OIG - Mr. Atkins
State/DGHR/PC - Mr. Delawie

Ms. Susan S. Westin,
Managing Director,
International Affairs and Trade,
U.S. General Accounting Office.

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Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report

"FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls,"
(GAO-02-237, Job Code 320022)

The Department of State appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The GAO is correct in identifying a number of difficulties the Department faces in meeting its diverse and changing language requirements. We believe that the single largest, and overwhelmingly, the most significant factor that prevents us from meeting our language staffing and proficiency goals is our staffing shortfall of over 1100 people as outlined in our Diplomatic Readiness report. Without adequate capacity to fill all positions and without a "training float" of personnel to ensure we can send people to training without suffering staffing gaps, we will not be able to meet our goals. The Secretary has committed to a Diplomatic Readiness Initiative that will meet our staffing and training needs.

In this context of staffing shortfalls, we believe that the Department has done remarkably well in meeting staffing requirements in language-designated positions. While many positions are simply not filled due to our overall staffing shortages, of those positions that were filled last year, 83 percent were filled with fully language-qualified employees, or those assigned to appropriate language training, and 10 percent were filled with employees who had some proficiency and were going to participate in language programs at posts. That program is designed and managed at posts and allows employees, even those who have the required skills - to strengthen their language skills while on the job. Also, we assign employees to non-language-designated positions who do have some relevant language skills and also assign many employees who exceed the required language proficiency. With increased staffing that will allow for more training, we will be able to increase the number of positions designated for language because we will have a better chance of staffing them with language-qualified employees and because it will help us do the work more effectively.

We offer the following information with regard to specific issues raised in the report. We provide, first, some additional context and explanation for some of GAO's conclusions, and second, a response to the report's recommendation.

See comment 1.

The report identified some data deficiencies. We agree that accurate information on the total number of language-designated positions in the Department was not provided. This was due to some errors in data collection and processing at the macro level with the Department's new personnel management database. At this date, we believe we have identified the source of the errors and are now correcting the data as well as the processes for collecting and using the data in the future. We anticipate validating this correction shortly and will be able to produce this information in the future. However, the report's characterization of the Department's inability to provide the total number of language designated positions is somewhat misleading. The Department is fully aware at the post, bureau, and Department levels of the status of language-designated positions and language skills of bidders on positions through the assignments process. That process relies on case-by-case, primary-source data, not the global data in which there are errors.

In addition, we agree that reports to Congress on language staffing vary. This is due to two factors. First, our system is fluid. Every year, we assign one-third of our foreign service employees, reevaluate all language-designated positions, and complete training of many employees in languages they began studying one or two years before. This means that natural variation in staffing of language-designated positions will occur. Secondly, part of the discrepancy between reports arose from the aforementioned data problem. It is also partly explained by the fact that we previously reported unfilled language-designated positions as ones in which the language requirement was not met. However, the Congressional requirement is to report on actual assignments. From now on, our report will only consider positions filled that year and measure the language skills of the employee assigned. This report data is accurate and not affected by the data system errors. It is based on a hand count by the office responsible for the assignments process of assignments made that year.

See comment 2.

The GAO recommends that the Department develop a workforce planning approach to language needs. We believe that languages are integral to our work and are important to our mission. However, we do not have a separate workforce plan for languages because each of our employees is required to do much more than use a foreign language. We have a comprehensive, coherent approach to meeting our language needs that fits with our unique Foreign Service system. It addresses many of the elements of

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workforce planning in the OPM model GAO references, but is tailored to our system.

- We have targeted outreach to attract candidates for the Foreign Service who have language skills. We hire Foreign Service employees based on a wide range of skills that are carefully selected to predict success in this career. Language skills are not a primary focus, but we actively seek candidates who possess language skills as well as other required skills. We have done outreach at universities with strong language programs and conferences of language professionals, and we use fellowships that emphasize language skills as sources from which to recruit Foreign Service candidates. We do not believe that the solution to shortfalls in languages in the Foreign Service is to hire only to those language deficiencies.

- In meeting the requirements for Civil Service interpreters and translators, positions in which almost 100 percent of the employee's time is spent using a foreign language, the Department follows a dual approach. Staff members are recruited through a highly selected and targeted recruitment of experienced professionals to meet recurring requirements in the major world languages. The need for additional personnel to handle surge requirements in the world languages and all needs for speakers of more exotic languages are met through the careful recruitment and testing of individual contractors who are available on an "as needed" basis.

- We have a flexible and responsive system so we can respond to changing needs. Our system reflects this goal with: entry-level hiring, a "generalist" emphasis, training in several languages, and promotions based on broad skills. Language needs vary from year to year based on international realities and policy priorities. A year ago we needed Albanian speakers desperately. This year we need Pashto speakers. Long-term projections are difficult and hiring to those projections would not be responsive enough to the changing needs. In the area of interpreter/ translator positions which are not part of the Foreign Service, we use flexible contractors. We do not believe that rigid planning in the sense GAO suggests of projecting needs and hiring to them would help meet our staffing and proficiency shortfalls.

See comment 3.

- We do work to anticipate coming broad trends in language needs and build needed capacity. For example, we are preparing to produce increasing numbers of Chinese and Arabic speakers that will be increasingly in demand in the coming years, even though we do not have current assignments for them. We will be seeking ways to extend that to other needed languages such as Farsi. What we will also need in coming years as the international environment continues to shift is not just language skills but relevant experience and diplomatic skills -- for that we must turn to our employees who are already on board. For that reason we have a system that is responsive and relies on internal resources.

- To identify those changing needs on the ground, every year we undergo a detailed and comprehensive review of language needs by posts. This process begins with posts identifying new or changed needs and allows the initial recommendations to be made from the field where position requirements are best understood. Requests for changes are reviewed in Washington by the appropriate regional and functional bureaus, the Foreign Service Institute's language school and the Bureau of Human Resources.

- Employees are selected for positions based on a range of qualifications, including language. The language requirements of positions are key factors in assignments and waivers of requirements when an employee's proficiency is not at the level required are given judiciously and only when we believe that additional time for training would leave an untenable staffing gap, when other qualifications are deemed more critical, and when other candidates are not available.

- The Foreign Service Institute is able to flexibly adjust training to meet needs and produce the language skills in employees that the service requires.

- We instituted a new language incentive pay plan in 1999 to create incentives for the study and use of hard languages. It is too early to assess its effectiveness because many employees assigned under the new system have only recently arrived at their posts.

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The following are GAO's comments on the Department of State's letter dated December 18, 2001.

GAO Comments

1. The State Department's response notes that such data are available in primary records. However, information in this format is of little use to internal management and congressional decisionmakers unless it can be systematically analyzed, summarized, and presented.

2. The State Department lists a disparate assortment of activities—targeted outreach of foreign language speakers and translators, a "generalist" approach to staff development, annual surveys of post language needs—as examples of how they have addressed many of the elements of workforce planning. While the State Department's actions should offer some benefits, they do not represent a strategic approach to workforce planning. Our report recommendation is designed to help focus attention on the key elements embodied in such an approach. The State Department has partially addressed one of these elements by documenting its foreign language skills needs on an annual basis. However, as discussed in our report, the department has been unable to generate a consistent measure of its actual foreign language shortfalls because of inadequate departmentwide data. With regard to the other key elements, State still needs to set a strategic direction for its foreign language needs, develop an action plan for correcting foreign language shortfalls, and institute a monitoring process to assess action plan implementation and performance.

3. To address State's concern that our report prescribes a rigid approach to workforce planning, we revised our recommendation to clarify that it focuses on the core planning principles promoted by OPM and GAO. These principles should serve as the basis for the detailed human capital programs that agencies design to meet their unique needs.

Comments from the Foreign Commercial Service

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary for International Trade
Washington, D.C. 20230

JAN 1 0

Mr. Joseph A. Christoff
Director, International Affairs
and Trade
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Christoff:

Thank you for the draft GAO report "Foreign Languages: Human Capital Approach to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls" and the opportunity to comment. The report was enlightening and gave us an opportunity to view our agency practices and procedures. We appreciate your recommendations and my management team is considering them very carefully.

However, based on this careful review, we have several suggested modifications to the draft report. The enclosed list of suggested modifications helps to explain the unique nature of the Foreign Commercial Service work and the rationale behind the decisions that have been made. Please note, prior to this report, we were reviewing some of our hard-language designations, and had decided that we need to change the designation requirements for certain positions.

In closing, I want to assure you that I am committed to training our Foreign Commercial Service Officers up to the required language levels for all positions.

Again, we thank you for your work in producing this report.

Warm regards,

Grant D. Aldonas

Enclosure

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Comments from the Federal Bureau of Investigation

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Washington, D.C. 20535

December 11, 2001

Mr Joseph A Christoff
Director
International Affairs and Trade
General Accounting Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D C 20548

Dear Mr Christoff

Thank you for providing the Department of Justice (Department) with the opportunity to respond to GAO's draft report entitled, "FOREIGN LANGUAGES Human Capital Approach Needed to Correct Staffing and Proficiency Shortfalls " The Department has asked us to prepare their response since we were the only component of the Department involved in this review

The FBI is appreciative of GAO's observations in the aforementioned draft report Although the FBI has experienced notable resource shortfalls in critical language areas, GAO recognizes that the FBI's Foreign Language Program (FLP) is on track with current strategic and workforce planning to correct these shortfalls The following comments include an update of the Bureau's recent successes in narrowing the gaps between requirements and resources

GAO's report shows that all agencies experience resource gaps in key language areas Recent world events, however, have particularly intensified the focus on the lack of adequate foreign language resources in the U S Government The ability to provide competent linguists on short notice in all languages, not only the less commonly spoken languages, is a continuing challenge for everyone

See comment 1.

The Intelligence Community (IC) (Foreign Language Committee and Foreign Language Executive Committee) recently met to establish a "Strategic Direction for Intelligence Community Foreign Language Activities " This planning document recognizes that although the various IC agencies have different requirements and uses for foreign language skills and capabilities, there must be an integrated strategy and cooperation among components to meet today's challenges The Strategic Direction calls for IC components to coordinate, integrate, and effectively apply limited foreign language resources throughout the IC, as well as to collaborate within the IC and with other U S Government agencies as well as academia and the commercial sector to meet requirements

Mr. Joseph A. Christoff

While effective workforce planning is critical, the FBI sees this collaboration and cooperation in foreign language matters as a key step toward meeting the challenges facing the IC and law enforcement communities today. In fact, it is the only way the U.S. Government can quickly respond to emergency requirements. As cited in the report, one such collaborative effor., LEILA (Law Enforcement Interagency Linguist Access), will provide member Department of Justice and IC components quick access to competent and vetted contract linguists who work for translation companies under contract to the U.S. Government.

GAO also recognizes the increased demand for linguists with a high level of proficiency in the foreign language as well as in English. Although the FBI does not have a recruitment program specifically targeted at recruiting native speakers, the Bureau advertises in ethnic publications as part of its overall language recruitment strategy. Ninety-five percent of the FBI Contract Linguist and Language Specialist applicants are native speakers of the foreign language. As noted in the report, conducting background investigations on native speakers can be particularly difficult; however, in recognition of the benefits of highly qualified native speakers, the Bureau does not shy away from recruiting them.

There is an increased need for FBI Special Agents who speak foreign languages both domestically and abroad. While the FBI does not set specific staffing goals for Special Agents with foreign language skills, FBI field offices are surveyed annually for their Special Agent linguist needs. The results of these surveys directly impact the focused recruitment and hiring of Special Agent linguist applicants, as well as the deployment of Special Agents with foreign language skills. Special Agent applicants who demonstrate a proficiency in a foreign language are considered more competitive than equally qualified applicants who do not have foreign language skills.

Successful efforts to bring on board qualified linguists in recent months have significantly reduced or eliminated the unaddressed work in most languages. For example, the recent FBI recruitment effort to hire Arabic and Farsi linguists will yield enough additional language resources to completely satisfy the requirements for both of these languages in the years to come.

The FBI views GAO's report on foreign language capabilities and shortfalls as a timely and necessary focus on an important and highly complex issue facing the U.S. Government today. Recent world events have particularly stressed the consequences of the lack of critical foreign language resources throughout the government. There is no doubt that increased attention to this issue will bring about the activities within the government, academia, and commercial sector needed to meet the growing language requirements projected in future years.

-2-

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Mr. Joseph A. Christoff

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. Please contact us if you have questions or desire additional discussion.

Sincerely yours,

John E. Collingwood
Assistant Director
Office of Public and
Congressional Affairs

-3-

The following are GAO's comments on the Federal Bureau of Investigation's letter dated December 11, 2001.

GAO Comments

1. We requested that the Central Intelligence Agency provide a briefing on this important report. However, they declined to meet with us.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Phillip Herr, (202) 512-8509.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the person named above, Michael ten Kate, Joseph Brown, Maria Oliver, Richard Seldin, and Rona Mendelsohn made key contributions to this report.

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